

OFFICIAL NEWS RELEASE

MISSISSIPPI FORESTRY COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wildfire-related Fatality Reported in Montgomery County

JACKSON, *Miss.* – One wildfire-related fatality has been reported in Montgomery County. The Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) would like to express our deepest condolences to those affected by the tragic incident.

On October 27, 2016, MFC wildland firefighters were called to suppress a wildfire. It appears that a Private Landowner engaged in agricultural field burning while his county was under a burn ban. The burn ban was issued due to extreme drought conditions in the area. The fire escaped his control and became a wildfire, which started to spread quickly. During his efforts to suppress the wildfire, an event occurred which allowed the fire to overtake him. An investigation into the incident is ongoing at this time.

This incident brings to light the importance of adhering to all burn bans statewide. In Mississippi, 67 out of 82 counties remain under burn bans. The Governor's partial state level burn ban, which offers no exemptions, and all individual county burn bans remain in effect through the weekend.

To see a complete list of burn bans in Mississippi, please visit: www.mfc.ms.gov/burn-bans

Since September 1, 2016, MFC wildland firefighters have responded to and suppressed 658 wildfires that burned 5,761 acres. During this time, 31 structures were destroyed or damaged, while another 1,039 were threatened by wildfire activity and saved by MFC wildland firefighters.

"We are deeply saddened by the news from Montgomery County," said Charlie Morgan, State Forester. "Wildfires can start with just a spark and spread quickly to endanger forestland, homes, and lives. Please do your part to help prevent wildfires by observing local burn bans and exercising proper fire safety."

When a burn ban is in effect, it means no outdoor burning is allowed. Burn ban restrictions include campfires, bonfires, fire pits, fire rings, fireworks, burn barrels, brush piles, debris burning, field burning - anything that produces an ember has the potential to start a wildfire. The wind can carry floating embers away from the original fire and start a spot fire up to one-half mile away from the burning area.

Any person who knowingly and willfully violates a burning ban is guilty of a misdemeanor and may be fined not less than \$100 and not more than \$500. Fines are enforced by the local Sheriff's Department. Anyone that sets a fire is responsible for that fire AND the smoke generated by that fire. If a fire escapes and burns or damages the lands/property of another, the person that set that fire is liable for those damages

Propane/ gas grills, propane/ gas heaters, and charcoal grills are allowed under burn bans. These devices do not produce an ember when they are in use. They should be used as described by their manufacturer's instructions, located safely away from combustible materials, and never left unattended.

Safety tip: Charcoal grill briquettes can be dangerous if they are not disposed of properly after use. Always let the coals cool completely and douse in water before disposing of them in a metal container. The residual ash should be cold to the touch before disposal. The MFC has responded to wildfires in the past started by improperly disposing of charcoal grill ash.

The Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) is 600 + in most areas of the state, which means that the area is experiencing a severe drought. At this time, drought conditions are favorable for an increase in the frequency and severity of wildfire activity. The KBDI measures the water content of the soil and duff layers; the scale ranges from 0 - 800 with 800 meaning there is no soil moisture available for vegetation. The number on the KBDI index increases each day the area does not experience rainfall. To view a current KBDI map, visit: http://bit.ly/KBDI2016 Wildfire prevention tips:

- Find out if there is a burn ban in effect for your area before burning. For a complete list of burn bans, visit: www.mfc.ms.gov/burn-bans
- Check the local weather forecast do not burn on dry, windy days. The wind carries embers long distances, which can cause spot fires as far away as one-half mile from the burning area.
- Choose a safe burn site for outdoor recreational burning keep campfires small, only burn untreated wood debris (waste, plastic, rubber tires, and other manufactured products may not be burned), and keep a garden hose or source of water easily accessible. To view the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality standards regarding outdoor burning, visit: bit.ly/MDEQOpenBurning
- The same preventive measures apply when using charcoal grills. When you are finished using a charcoal grill, always let the coals cool completely and douse in water before disposing of them in a metal container. Never leave a grill unattended.
- To report a wildfire, dial 911 or call the Central Dispatch Center for your area, visit: www.mfc.ms.gov/wildfire-report

Nationwide, nine out of ten wildfires are caused by people and could have been prevented with proper care. Please do your part to help prevent wildfire activity by checking burn bans and weather conditions before doing any outdoor recreational burning.

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Established in 1926, the Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) protects the state's valuable forest resources from wildfire, manages approximately 480,000 acres of forested School Trust Land, and delivers quality forest management services and assistance to both rural and urban landowners. Our mission is to provide active leadership in forest protection, forest management, forest inventory, and effective forest information distribution, necessary for Mississippi's sustainable forest-based economy.

There are approximately 19.8 million forested acres in Mississippi. The forestry and forest products industry has a \$12.3 billion economic impact on the state of Mississippi and represents almost 70,000 jobs.

Resources:

Mississippi Forestry Commission Website - www.mfc.ms.gov

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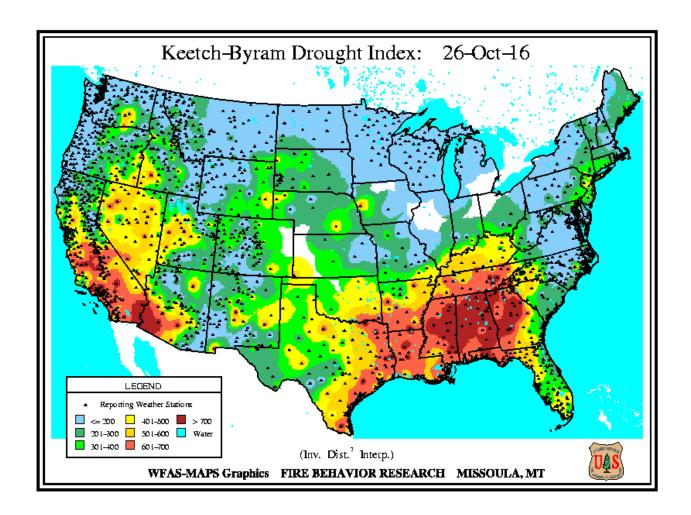


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